

Libby Community Advisory Group

Meeting Summary

May 8, 2003

Introductions

Gerald Mueller and members of the Libby Community Advisory Group (CAG) introduced themselves. A list of the members and visitors in attendance is attached below as Appendix 1.

Agenda

The CAG agreed to add a presentation by Dr. Putnam first on the agenda. Mr. Mueller then reviewed the following agenda for this meeting:

- \$ Putnam Presentation
- \$ EPA Report
- \$ ATSDR Report
- \$ County Report - Karol Spas
- \$ Thompson Letter
- \$ Public Comment

Presentation by Dr. Elizabeth Putnam

Dr. Putnam, with the University of Montana Center for Environmental Health Sciences, reminded the CAG that she is conducting research into the genetic basis of asbestos disease. She stated that in a previous appearance before the CAG she committed to report to it before releasing results of her research nationally. By analyzing some 200 blood samples from Libby volunteers, Dr. Putnam has found that while an alteration in only one gene has no apparent relation to asbestos disease, a pattern of gene alterations is correlated to a higher risk of asbestos disease or to more severe disease. These results will shortly be released at a conference of the American Thoracic Society in Seattle.

EPA Report

Jim Christiansen and Wendy Thomi reported on behalf of EPA on the following topics:

Residential and Commercial Cleanups - EPA met its 2003 goal of cleaning 40 properties by May 1. The total number of residences/commercial buildings cleanups completed is now 45. The next cleanup targets are 8-10 properties per week or 100 additional properties by the end of July. This would bring us to a total of about 165 cleanups by the start of fall. These targets would keep EPA on schedule to meet the goal of 250-300 property cleanups per year. Outdoor cleanups are beginning and the road to the mine is open and contaminated dirt is being moved over it to the mine for disposal. An additional contractor has been hired, Salut, a small business teamed with MARCOR which worked in Libby during the emergency cleanup phase. Currently, Salut is doing restoration at the screening plant site, which is owned by the Parkers. After finishing this work, Salut will be integrated into the residential cleanups. Another three sub-contractors will be added in July.

Landfill - EPA's contract with Lincoln County should be completed in a week, so use of the hazardous waste cell at the landfill should begin soon.

BN Cleanup - With the opening of the landfill hazardous waste cell, BN will begin the cleanup

of the rail yard. BN will do the work, and EPA will oversee it and will conduct ambient air sampling. EPA has previously approved BN's cleanup plan. This cleanup should be finished in about three weeks.

High School Track - Resurfacing the high school track will begin in mid-June, shortly after school is out. The new rubberized surface will be installed.

Property Screening - Last summer, about 3,200 properties were screened. EPA did not obtain access to or couldn't make contact with another 400 properties. The screening allows EPA to divide the properties into one of three categories, those definitely in need of cleanup, those not needing cleanup, and those that need additional examination. This year, EPA plans to conduct various sampling activities at a total of 1,800 properties, including attempting to visit the 400 properties it did not obtain access to last year and revisiting some of the previously screened properties. The same general process will be used as last year except that in many cases appointments will be arranged by calling property owners.

Soil Sampling Analytical Methodology - The new method for analyzing soils works well, but its performance review is not yet completed. The performance review will allow confidence in the methodology beyond a shadow of a doubt which is important given possible litigation. EPA expects to begin using the methodology to analyze soil samples about June 1. Analysis of samples collected last year will require about six months and will be completed by the end of this year.

Document Releases - While preparing documents has a lessor priority than the cleanups and sampling, several cleanup-related documents should be released during the next couple of months:

- \$ The draft containment screening study addendum which overviews the property screening;
- \$ The sampling plans for this summer's remedial investigation work which explain how EPA will sample properties that required additional sampling to determine if cleanup is required;
- \$ The detailed design plan for individual properties, including the pre-design work plan and the design analysis report;
- \$ The response action work plan which will include the details of the interior and exterior cleanups of each house;
- \$ The trigger level and clearance criteria memo which will specify the criteria used to decide on individual property cleanups; and
- \$ The HEPA vacuum cleanup memo. EPA expects to provide several thousand households with a HEPA vacuum to ensure that houses remain clean. The cost of each vacuum will be about \$350.

Of these documents, the response action work plan and the trigger level and clearance criteria memo will probably be the most important for Libby people to review.

Cleanup Budget - Mr. Christiansen said that he is less optimistic about the budget situation than a month ago. He has asked for the same level of funding as last year. However, EPA headquarters has asked him to prepare budgets assuming different levels of funding. EPA has requested \$150 million for superfund cleanups nationwide, but expects to receive only \$50 million. Libby remains a top EPA cleanup priority. Mr. Christiansen has asked for EPA headquarters personnel to come to the next CAG meeting to explain the budget situation.

Economic Redevelopment Workshop - Wendy Thomi reported that the economic development workshop held two weeks ago in Libby was a success as measured by attendee satisfaction. She thanked the local workshop planners.

Fact Sheet - Ms. Thomi also stated that the EPA website includes a summary of activities in Libby since 1999. EPA wants to include in this summary a contact person or persons from Libby. Ms. Thomi will check at the next CAG meeting for a contact volunteer or recommendation.

Audience Member Comment - Regarding outside cleanups, presently, homeowners can go to only one vendor to replace plants. A rose bush from this vendor costs \$25, whereas the price at our local discount store is only \$3.98. We need access to additional vendors so that we can get a better price; otherwise, we will not be able to replace the plants we lose to the cleanup.

Answer - We are working with the Technical Advisory Group on this problem so that homeowners will have some choices.

CAG Member Question - In the residential cleanups, are any attics being sealed with contaminated insulation left in them?

Answer - EPA's objective is to clean the insulation out of all of the attics. Insulation will be left in attics only if sufficient room is not available to get into them for cleaning. So far, only in one case has attic insulation been sealed in place. A small attic over a garage did not provide sufficient access room. In another house, the EPA contractor considered sealing an attic because of space considerations, but upon further investigation the decision was made that enough access was available to remove the insulation, which is EPA's preference.

CAG Member Question - Last year in an outside cleanup river silt was used to replace contaminated soil. This year, items such as an oil tank on the replacement soil are sinking,. Is any recourse available for the sinking?

Answer - Yes. EPA has specifications for replacement soils to try to avoid problems like this. We will go out and look at this property.

CAG Member Question - Have we reached crunch time with next year's cleanup budget?

Answer - I am getting nervous, but I have not received budget numbers yet. If cuts must be made, I will first cut the 2004 investigation of the mine and then delay investigation of the town of Troy. Cuts beyond the amount allocated for these two investigations will delay cleanup. For every \$30 thousand or so in cuts, one property cleanup will have to be postponed.

Audience Member Question - Should the CAG begin to contact officials concerning these pending budget cuts?

Answer - My purpose at this point is merely to warn the CAG of possible budget cuts.

Audience Member Question - Would budget cuts affect the cleanup at the Simpson mill?

Answer - EPA should still be in a position to do the cleanup. The cleanup will address at least three areas. The central maintenance building has vermiculite coming out of the walls. So far, cost estimates indicate little difference between cleaning this building or demolishing it. We are awaiting the decision of the building owner. The plywood dryer also has vermiculite insulation. The third area is the old nursery site which will require cleanup of a large amount of soil.

Audience Member Question - I have two questions about the HEPA vacuum. Will it be tested with Libby asbestos fiber, and what will we have to do dispose of the material which the vacuum captures?

Answer - The HEPA vacuum captures about 99.9% of the particles and hence about the same percentage of the asbestos fibers. The vacuum filter which captures the particles does not need special disposal can just be thrown away with regular trash.

CAG Member Comment - The HEPA vacuum filters are expensive, about \$40 a piece.

Response - Once EPA cleans the houses, the homeowners will not need to use HEPA vacuum every day. It need only be used for the polishing touch.

Audience Member Comment -EPA should buy a vacuum and one filter for houses in the cleanups.

Response - That is probably a good idea. EPA will consider providing filters.

CAG Member Comment - When we convinced Governor Martz to use the governor's one time superfund designation, we expected that necessary funding would be forthcoming.

Response - So did I.

Audience Member Comment - During the redevelopment conference, the motivational speaker, Roger Brooks, looked at EPA's Libby brochure and said that, from an economic development perspective, it should be replaced.

Response - EPA's goal is not the same as economic redevelopment. It is important for people to know that there are issues here.

ATSDR Report

Dan Strausbaugh reported on behalf of ATSDR on the following subjects:

Tremolite Asbestos Registry - To develop the Registry, ATSDR reviewed WR Grace and EPA files and identified some 2,000 former WR Grace workers. ATSDR then attempted to contact the workers and their household contacts and reached 781 former workers and 2,214 household contacts who are living and determined that 951 former workers and 551 household contacts are deceased. From these contacts, beginning in fiscal year 2004, ATSDR plans to invite people to participate in the Registry. Eventually, people who qualified for the medical screening who were not workers or their household contacts will also be invited to participate in the Registry.

ATSDR Reports - The report on the combined medical testing has been submitted to an environmental health journal and should be published within two months. The CT study is under peer review and will be published after the review is completed.

MASSA - The Montana Asbestos Screening and Surveillance Activity (MASSA) operated by the State Department of Public Health and Human Services is open at 609 Mineral Avenue and has been operating for one week. As has been discussed at past meetings, MASSA provides free asbestos screening similar to that formerly operated by ATSDR. Individuals who participated in the ATSDR screening in 2000 or 2001 who had negative test results are eligible for rescreening. Other eligible people who did not participate in the past years are also eligible for the MASSA screening. Brochures making this announcement are being circulated around town.

CAG Member Comment - Did you say that the Tremolite Asbestos Registry has been expanded beyond workers and their household contacts to others exposed in Libby?

Response - The initial efforts have concentrated on tracing workers and their household contacts. The Registry will include people who meet the criteria for the ATSDR and MASSA medical screening.

County Report

Karol Spas, the public health nurse for southern Lincoln county, reported on the receipt of a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant. She reminded the CAG that Representative Carney in the 2001 Montana Legislature obtained funding for Lincoln County to hire a grant writer to seek funding for asbestos-related health care. The County hired Dennis Alexander and Tracy Velazquez as grant writers, and last fall they wrote a grant to HRSA to fund creation of a network for people with asbestos-related disease. HRSA has awarded a three year grant to Lincoln County, including a total of \$133,000 for the first year, \$162,000 for the second, and \$190,000 for the third. The grant will fund a half-time program director (Ms. Spas) to assist people with asbestos diseases to obtain services from the CARD Clinic, the CORA Program, St. John's Lutheran Hospital, and the Asbestos-Related Health Care Project. The HRSA grant program will act as an entry point for people into available asbestos-related health services from the just listed care providers and to other non-medical community services from churches and youth groups. The grant also includes some money for direct services such as medication and in-home care. In the first year, \$50,000 is available for direct services, \$60,000 in the second year, and \$70,000 in the third year. Ms. Spas said that she would come back to the CAG when the program is operating.

Audience Member Question - Given the limited amount of money available, have you or will you be developing criteria for providing the direct services?

Answer - Yes, we will be developing criteria that will guide allocations for direct services.

Thompson Letter

At its last meeting, the CAG asked Clinton Maynard to draft a letter to US Department of Health and Humans Services Secretary Tommy Thompson requesting a declaration of a public health emergency in Libby. With the assistance of members of the CAG and others in the Libby community, Mr. Maynard drafted the letter included below as Appendix 2.

CAG Action - After discussing whether to postpone action on the letter until the next meeting to allow additional drafting work on the draft, a majority of the CAG members present voted to send Mr. Maynard's draft of the letter to Secretary Thompson with two changes: the words "stop-gap, band-aid" were deleted from the third paragraph; and the words "EPA-established" were deleted from the letter's signature block. A signature page was circulated for members of the CAG and the audience.

Public & CAG Member Comment

There was no additional comment.

Next Meeting

The next regular CAG meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 12, 2003 in the Ponderosa Room of Libby City Hall. *To accommodate a presentation by Dr. Andrij Holian of the University of Montana, the CAG decided that the meeting time will be changed to 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.*

Appendix 1 CAG Member & Guest Attendance List May 8, 2003

Members	Group/Organization Represented
George Keck	Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
Sandy Wagner	Community Health Center/TAG
K.W. Maki	Libby Schools
Craig French	Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Bob Zimmerman	Cabinet Resource Group
George Bauer	City of Libby
Bob Dedrick	Asbestos Victim
Ken Hays	Senior Citizens
David F. Latham	<i>The Montanian Newspaper</i>
Jim Christiansen	US EPA
Wendy Thomi	US EPA
Dan Strausbaugh	ATSDR
Mike Noble	Asbestos Victim (alternate for Leroy Thom)
Gayla Benefield	Lincoln County Asbestos Victims Relief Organization
Eileen Carney	State Representative
Clinton Maynard	Area Asbestos Research Group
Norita Skramstad	Asbestos Victim
Visitors	
Dr. Elizabeth Putnam	UM Center for Environmental Health Sciences
Karol Spas	Lincoln County Health Nurse

Appendix 2

May 8, 2003

The Honorable Tommy Thompson
Secretary of United States Department Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, D C 20201

Dear Mr. Thompson:

We understand the enormous task that you must be faced with as you engage in your responsibilities of managing the health issues of our great nation. It is with this in mind that we express our deepest appreciation for taking time to understand the magnitude of disaster that has occurred in our small town of Libby, Montana.

As you are probably aware, we are currently the home of our nation's highest priority superfund site. This is due to the widespread contamination of a most toxic form of mineral fiber, amphibole asbestos. This mineral fiber is a contaminant in the vermiculite that was mined and processed locally for 70 years prior to 1990. The miners and the general population were unaware that they were being exposed to this highly disease-potent, microscopic, toxic substance. Our awareness as a community began three-and-a-half years ago and today we understand that we face a desperate future.

We soon came to realize that our current and former exposed population would require specialized health care and we began to approach our federal government to meet this need, which is expected to last for the next 80-plus years, provided exposures cease. With the assistance of our on-scene federal partners, we have engaged in an exhaustive search to identify a program that would address this need, only to come up with stop-gap, band-aid measures that are unsound and non-comprehensive. Until recently that is, as we have now discovered that within "superfund legislation" exists a solution to this most troubling dilemma. It is clear that the framers of this legislation had the wisdom to provide a solution in the event that a population such as ours had been exposed to toxic substance. CERCLA 9604 (i)(1), provided our nation with the establishment of an agency the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), to address problems such as off-setting the impacts of toxic exposure.

Secretary Thompson, we are asking you to declare a "public health emergency" as stated in this legislation, 9604 (i)(1)(D), which would provide healthcare and engage the "all important" government agencies listed, therefore providing a comprehensive, scientific approach to addressing this tragedy.

Exposure presents a grim reality; debilitating lung dysfunction disease (asbestosis), terminal cancer (mesothelioma), cancers of other target organs (that we might survive if detected early enough) and shortened life-span. These devastating impacts of exposure can be decreased through specialized medical therapies and through research that might provide better therapies than exist today. Our immune systems have been compromised, robbing us of our health and these diseases create astronomical medical costs that will leave our families in financial ruin. We are asking that you use your authority to assure the long overdue fairness for our exposed people, to the fullest extent as provided by the law of our land.

In addition, we have come to recognize that this American disaster was not simply due to an oversight. The State of Montana did a full mineral analysis in 1956 and the federal government was aware of the problem, at least by 1979. Much of this toxic exposure was preventable, but due to greed, ineptness, policy failure and apparent corruption, this was allowed to happen to us. Therefore, we respectfully ask that you launch a thorough investigation to identify, and address these problems so that other Americans, who are not as aware as we are today, do not have to endure the plight of Libby, Montana. For those who have died and those who will die as casualties of failure, greed and perceived corruption, accountability and justice must be upheld. If this callous disregard for human life is to be viewed as acceptable, we can be assured that more Americans in the years to come are to meet our same fate.

Please correct this injustice for our nation. Please declare a "public health emergency" for Libby.

Thank you
The EPA-established Libby Community Advisory Group